

Ogeebiccoon Roots by Nikki Crowe

My great grandfather was known as an environmentalist before his time; before it was cool to recycle. He was responsible to the land and he taught my grandfather, and now the teachings have been passed to me. Studying climate change at the University of Kansas, I was washing roots in a science lab. The tiny roots had to be handled carefully to get the information we needed to pass on to others. I thought about my roots, where I came from and what I had survived, being a native woman from a family afflicted with abuse of all kinds; alcoholism, denial, and a lack of healthy coping skills. My roots were strong but still had to be handled carefully to survive the traumatic events and still grow and be a valuable to my community.

At about the same time I was going through therapy, on the advice of a 'Pawnee' elder, he said I wouldn't get through college without resolving my unresolved issues. Through therapy, I learned to cope with post traumatic stress disorder, and through my work with plants I learned that when we heal ourselves we can heal the land. Part of my clan responsibilities is to take care of the land. With threats of pollution and climate change, we have to teach our babies about the plants and trees; their names. Let them know early on not just how to mimic the names of colors and numbers, but the names of our rooted brothers and sisters too. People and plants are a reflection of one another, not one is above or below the other, but a true reflection. If one is sick, the other will remain so too. Through my effort to heal myself, now work in tribal communities to help others learn about plants and how they can be used for food and medicine. I teach about sustainability of not only the land but of culture and traditional ecological knowledge. We have a responsibility to heal from our history and strengthen our roots.